A PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERSTANDING OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS

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This paper deals with the historical influences of applied linguistics, felt most emphatically in the field of language teaching. In the way, the complex set of those influences can be discerned to have undergone various adjustments to bring applied linguistics into line with the ideas of new users and its context of use.

1. LINGUISTIC/ BEHAVIORIST :A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH:

Applied linguistics in the sphere of language teaching is a fairly modern phenomenon. It occurred in the 1940's in the later part of the Second World War. The war vested its energy to enable American soldiers to speak the languages of pacific or of other places where Americans were sent to fight battle .When this concern was taken up by some theoretical linguists who had

an intimate knowledge of the structure of especially, the indigenous, American Indian languages , three things came out into discussion,(1) the application of linguistics analyses to language teaching ,(2) attempted solution to the problem of language teaching, provided in **audio-lingualism** which marks the beginning of applied linguistics as a discipline, and (3)the learning theory behind audio-lingualism: the more one repeats things, the more likely one is to learn them.

The linguistic analysis allows us to break the language up in to little units. But to the behaviorists a mystery remained that how the unit of analysis and the units of learning could be the same thing. Furthermore, in which manner these bits would actually come together in the mind of the learner. However, the behaviorists believed firmly that this would somehow happen. In some fashion these little fragments would be synthesized. Where the theory had left a vacuum, common sense at least seemed to imply that smaller digestible units were easier to learn. In the similar way, one can understand that learning takes place incrementally, in small portions.

The most important thing in audio – lingualism was a method that was indebted to linguistic theory, in its "scientifically chosen and arranged" language teaching materials. Fries (1945) insist that this approach depends on materials that are arranged according to linguistic principles, that the contribution of the technique of scientific analysis to language teaching is to "provide a thorough and consistent check of the language material", if the language teaching method that drives from this effectively ensures the maximum progress in the language being learned by the student.

Here, it is not a matter of debates about whether the debt that audio-lingualism owes to linguistics is direct or indirect, indeed, whether the aural- oral procedure of audio-lingual teaching has anything to do with learning theory. (cf. Carroll 197:110). One's concern should be with the claim that the proponents of audio-lingualism were applying linguistic analysis, and that,

in doing so, their efforts were scientific and had for that reason become authoritative. James sums it up (1993:23):

> This approach says that since linguistics is about language and it is language that we teach, linguistics must also be about L2 teaching.

The responsiveness of applied linguistics, at its inception, therefore remained in the dual sense --- (a) to the way its originators saw the world, and (b) to the urgent demand of its historical context. The originators of the fledgling discipline believed: scientific analysis has the double ways --- one to truth and other to the desired behavior in the client. As such, it has been held as an article of faith, which, as Stevick (1990: 7) points out, is 'pervasive, unrecognized, and therefore very powerful'. As Stevick, referring to Maley's pronouncements, also explains, those assumptions that remain untested "are comparable to the assumptions that lead to acceptance or rejection of what are called religions". The emphasis is therefore that the view that the originators had of the world, viz. that scientific analysis would be an authoritative guide to a desired outcome, was much stronger even than their responsiveness to an urgent historical demand. In fact originators' response to the urgent demands of the historical context of applied linguistics is crucially determined by their response to the way the originators saw the world.

Lado's vacuum theory claimed that his seventeen 'principles of a scientific approach' to language teaching were indeed derivable form linguistic theory (Lado 1964: 49ff). Albert Weideman concluded:

> Such statement on the 'application' of linguistics in language teaching would no doubt, have been to be bordering on the absurd if it had not been for the aura of scientific truth in which they are dressed up. What is ludicrous upon subjecting them to closer scrutiny, however, becomes tragic when one is reminded that these principles provided the 'scientific' becomes tragic when one is reminded that these principles provided the

'scientific' justification for one of the most influential approaches to the teaching of foreign languages, viz, the audio-lingual method (Weideman, 1987:42).

This point reminds us to be critically aware --- responsible --- in doing applied linguistics. In this sense one would agree with James (1993:17) that applied linguistics 'is still under- defined'.

2) LINGUISTIC 'EXTENDED PARADIGM MODEL': LANGUAGE IS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON:

In applied linguistics this wave continues the **linguistic** tradition. The initial kind of analyses, namely phonological, morphological and syntactic analyses, for a while remained prominent in applied linguistic work. Later on, linguistic analysis included semantic studies, text linguistics, discourse analysis and all kinds of studies that placed language in a social context and claimed, therefore, that language was a social phenomenon, an instrument of communication. These studies began to influence applied linguistics as well, as is evident in the development of some varieties of communicative teaching at the end of the 1970's and the beginning of the 80's. Sridhar (1993:5) categorizes this wave as the 'extended paradigm model' of applied linguistics. The yielding of total developments, however, remained **a linguistic conception of applied linguistics**. The finer knowledge that outcomes was, if you wanted to teach languages then you had to make an analysis of languages first. But there was obviously something missing, a theory of language learning. The audio-linguists at least could claim such a theory for their designs, but what sort of learning theory, people were asking in the early 80's, was there behind communicative language teaching?.

3) MULTI – DISCIPLINARY MODEL: ATTENTION ALSO TO LEARNING THEORY AND PEDAGOGY: Missing of a language learning theory in the communicative approach brought a

doubt in the predominance of linguistic concerns in applied linguistics. As a result, those working in the field began to borrow from a multitude of other disciplines: from pedagogy, from psychology and especially from that branch of the latter dealt with learning theory. By the rise of transformational generative grammar, the stimulus provided in linguistic and the former's own reliance on cognitive psychology was another cross-current that aided this development. By linking up with insights from various disciplines other than linguistics, applied linguistics became a multi-disciplinary enterprise in the early to mid-80. This criticism was remarkable in that it was evidence of a practical classroom concern that helped to change applied linguistics --- a practitioner's concern, one might call it. Still the question remained: are units of analysis and units of learning necessarily the best units for learning a language that is not one's won? As Corder (1986; 186-187) puts it:

> The syllabus that a teacher uses is essentially a linear one, a list of linguistic forms in certain order. From all the evidence we have about the way linguistic knowledge develops spontaneously in the learner that is not the way things happen.

4) SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION RESEARCH: EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH INTO HOW LANGUAGES ARE LEARNED:

How could language courses be designed? The question remaining, the chomskyan ideas began to influence applied linguistics in the way that psychology could potentially provide an explanation for how languages are learned and how second languages are acquired. As Diane Larsen-Freeman (1993) pointed out in a keynote address to AILA, language teaching methods today unlike those of the 60's, have grown out of and have been influenced by second language acquisition research. The research that was imbued with the notion that learning another language is easier and more successful outside of the classroom than inside it, tells us how to replicate the conditions which appear to make language learning easier in the classroom which

normally is not very friendly environment to learn a language --- to facilitate language learning. Hence, as Lightbown and Spada (1993:72) remark:

> The design of communicative language teaching programs has sought to replace some of the characteristics of traditional instruction with those more typical of natural acquisition contexts.

This approach included Krashen's language teaching methodologies that come together in the Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell 1983: Terrel 1985). These ideas struck a powerful chord in mind of teachers who has already abandoned traditional grammar translation methods and audio-lingualism for communicative teaching.

5) CONSTRUCTIVISM: KNOWLEDGE OF A NEW LANGUAGE IS INTERACTIVELY CONSTRUCTED.

In the late eighties, applied linguistics has come to rely heavily on social theory. This type of applied linguistics reflected the characteristic features of **constructivism.** It deals with a revival of the older ideas on experiential learning: that somehow, when we learn, we construct knowledge in our interaction with others, be they teachers or peers. Knowledge is systematically constructed with others:

> In order to learn, students need an environment that provides both stimuli to learn and resources for learning. This rather stale observation takes on new meaning as we agree that students must construct their own knowledge --- New knowledge comes only from the engagement of the student's own interest in something beyond her present understanding (Moulton 1994:33).

In constructivism, incidentally, one found a belated psychological justification for communicative teaching (cf. Greyling, 1993). The basic techniques of communicative approach, such as information gap exercises, role play tasks and group information gathering techniques were ideal techniques for allowing the learner to build a language in interaction with others. The research that represents applied linguistics at this stage has been a called 'interpretive', since:

> Such research proposes that all knowledge is culturally imbedded in specific social contexts, and that it therefore needs to be understood --- from the particular points of view of the people acting in these contexts and how they collaborate to construct their realities socially (Cumming, 1994: 685).

The value of such analysis, as Spada (1994: 686) points out, is to examine interactions, for example: between teacher and learner, or between learner and learner, that may be more or less effective for language learning to take place, thus allowing the inexperienced teacher to become sensitive to good practice, and the experienced teacher to reflect on and find a systematic, rational justification for effective classroom performance.

To conclude, with the relativity of the discipline applied linguistics in the field of language teaching prevents its practitioners from entertaining the belief that, because they are doing 'applied science', their designed solution to a language problem will be sufficient.

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